NOTE XII.

ON AN ANOMALOUS SPECIES OF HARE DISCOVERED IN THE ISLE OF SUMATRA: LEPUS NETSCHERI.

BY

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The researches of naturalists hitherto made in order to ascertain the geographical range of the hare-tribe have led to the conclusion, that these animals, spread over the whole of America and Europe, over Northern and South-Africa, as well as over a great part of Asia, are not found in the neighbouring islands of the Philippines, in the whole Malayan Archipelago, and as appears are more-over wanting in the Malayan Peninsula.

Of the two genera composing the hare-tribe, the one, that of Lagomys, characterized by the entire want of tail, is confined to Northern Asia and the Rocky-Mountains of North-America. The other genus, that of Lepus, is represented in all the regions inhabited by the hare-tribe in general. An attempt to subdivide this genus in minor groups is attended with numerous difficulties. European sportsmen are in the habit of designing under the name of „rabbits" the species having the ears, legs and tail shorter than the true hares, and commonly making bur-

rows for their residence; but the variability of these characteristics in the different species does not allow a strict application of them. In comparing, for instance, the mountain-hare of South-Africa (Lepus saxatilis) and the Japanese species (Lepus brachyurus) to the common hare (Lepus timidus) we are obliged to range all the three species under the true hares with long legs; although we find, that the mountain-hare has the tail and ears considerably longer than our common hare, whereas the Japanese hare has the tail and ears as short as our common rabbit. The same variability not coinciding with other characteristics, exists with respect to the nature of the fur. We know that in the majority of species the wool viz: the imperfect hairs, grows at the expense of the true or perfectly developed hairs, and that such is in a great measure the case in some species during the cold season. In the Chinese hare (Lepus sinensis), for instance the hairs are developed at the expense of the wool, which is somewhat longer and coarser than in most of the other species, and in the small hare of Assam and Butan (Lepus hispidus), the hair is stiffened even to rigidness.

The known species, inhabiting the old world, the South-Eastern limits of the geographical range of the hare-tribe are the following.

1. Lepus nigricollis, Fr. Cuvier (Lepus melanauchen, Temminck, lapsu pennae), a true hare distinguished by its black neck, inhabiting the Indian peninsula and the island of Ceylon. This species occurs also in a wild state in some restricted parts of North-Western Java, but it is generally believed, that it has been introduced at an earlier period from Ceylon, a similar introduction having likewise taken place in the isle of Mauritius.

2. Lepus hispidus, Pearson; Caprolagus hispidus, Blyth, from Butan and Assam. This is an anomalous species, not only by its rigid hair, but more especially by its short ears, measuring only two thirds of those of our common

rabbit. Its legs and tail are short, and the animal is much inferior in size even to our common rabbit.

3. Lepus hainanus, Swinhoe, from the isle of Hainan. A true hare clothed with a woolly fur.

4. Lepus sinensis. According to Swinhoe, the Chinese hare ranges from Canton to Peking; it occurs also in the island of Formosa, and is the only species inhabiting these countries. It is a true hare, but its fur is provided at the expense of wool, with tolerably long and somewhat coarse hair, quite unlike to the woolly fur of the hare of Hainan, although this island is situated several degrees to the south of Canton.

5. The Japanese hare, Lepus brachyurus, Temminck. This is a true hare with a woolly fur and elongated legs, but it has a shorter tail and its ears are likewise shorter than usually, characteristics which bring the animal in these points near to the rabbits.

As stated before, no species of the hare-tribe has been hitherto observed, in the natural wild state, in the Philippines, nor in the Malayan Archipelago. I was, of course, surprised in the highest degree, when I read, in a letter adressed to me by E. Netscher, Esq., a member of the council of Dutch India, that this high functionary during his residence at Padang-Pandjang, situated in the upper countries (bovenlanden) of Padang on the South-West-Coast of the islands of Sumatra, had obtained a specimen of a small rabbit-like but very short-eared animal, which was entirely unknown to the natives. The specimen, preserved in spirits was kindly presented by this gentleman to our National Museum of Natural History, where it arrived some weeks ago. To my utter astonishment, it proved to belong to an totally unknown species of the hare-tribe, corresponding in size, form and shortness of the ears with Lepus hispidus, but presenting a still shorter tail, a woolly soft fur, and a system of coloration as beautiful as it is uncommon among the hare-tribe, the upper parts being largely striped and crossed with black and the greyish general tint of the

fur passing, on the hind part of the animal into a fine rusty tint.

However we may consider our little animal, we must acknowledge that, in the series of hares, it ranges next to Lepus hispidus, but that in other respects, it is anomolous and stands by itself.

In addition to the foregoing considerations I subjoin here a note furnished by Kelaart, Prodromus Faunae Zeylonicae, p. 72 on a small animal, living in the mountains of Ceylon, which, perhaps, falls into the category of Lepus netscheri and hispidus. Kelaart says: „an animal, called „a small hare" was described to us by a gentleman in Newera Ellia, which makes us think that a Lagomys also exists in the Island. This hare pursued by dogs took refuge in the hollow of a felled trunk of a tree, which it was made to quit only by smoking the hollow: the animal was eventually devoured by dogs. This notice will, we trust, attract the attention of some sportsmen in the alpine parts of the Island, who may probably be able to add another quadruped new to the Fauna of Ceylon."

In giving to our curious animal the name of its discoverer, I have been guided by the feeling of gratitude towards a gentleman, who has shown so remarkable an interest in the promotion of natural history.

Dr. Jentink, one of the officers of our Museum has, at my request, furnished the following details of the

LEPUS NETSCHERI n. sp.

The species about to be described is most curious and unlike to all that is hitherto known about Hares, though it does not present any perceptible difference in general structure and proportions of skull and skeleton, the fur is so strikingly colored, that one is reminded in this respect of certain species of the Cat-family.

Our new species is about equal in size to the common

Rabbit. Its ears however are much shorter, even shorter than in *L. hispidus*: the tail also is extraordinarily short, presenting the smallest number of vertebrae hitherto observed in Hare-tails. The ground-color of the soft and rather short fur on the upperparts of the body is a dirty yellowish grey, passing to a very beautiful mahogany brown on the haunches and hindparts. A black stripe, broad between the eyes, narrower on the back, runs from the tip of the nose, between the ears along the middle of the back to the extremity of the tail [1]). A circle round the eyes, the sides of the head behind the eyes, a line from these parts to the base of the ears and downwards in a semicircular curve round the cheeks to the corner of the mouth are of the same black color. The same color predominates on the external surface of the ears, further in a broad collar which on the chest becomes a triangular patch with the top turned downwards. Another broad black band commences on the shoulders and is curved upwards to the black stripe on the middle of the back with which it comes together just before the haunches; a simular broad band runs along the groins and approaches the black dorsal-stripe, whereas finally the thighs externally and a ring nearly round the middle of the tarsus are also of the same black color. On the rump and shoulders there is an admixture of black hairs. The hairs of the underparts of the body, inside of the legs, chin and those round the nostrils are white. The fore-legs and the hairs on the sole of the feet are of a more dark greyish hue. Whiskers entirely white or entirely black, only a few are white with a black tip. They are very numerous, longer than the head and the longest reach to the middle of the ear. Ears much shorter than the head, laid forwards the tip extends to the hindmost corner of the eye or slightly beyond it. Head broad; muzzle short; legs generally less developed than usually; tail very short.

1) On the hindmost part of the back this black line seems to acquire a more or less zigzaglike course.

	m. m.
Length from tip of nose to root of tail	417
Length of ear	35
Length of tarsus and nails	75

The skeleton presents *twelve* dorsal-vertebrae with *twelve* pair of ribs, *seven* lumbares and *twelve* sacrales and caudales: in the skeleton of the other Hare-species there are the same number of vertebrae dorsales and lumbares and of ribs, but the sacral and caudal vertebrae are always more numerous, viz: from *nineteen* to *twenty-four*. With regard to the number of vertebrae in the short tail the Sumatran species agrees with the genus Lagomys, but in Lagomys there are always *seventeen* pair of ribs and *four* or *five* lumbares.

The skull of our new species compared with that of the other Hares presents the following particularities; the antorbital foramina as usually present an open bony network but the zygomatic arches are less strong than in other Hares; the nasal bones are broader and less elongated than in true Hares and agree more with these parts in *L. hispidus*; the same is the case with the bony palate, which is nearly as long as broad, and with the incisors which are very strong and broad; the distance between the molar series and also between the zygomatic arches is very great. In structure and proportions of the skull the Sumatran Hare agrees more with *L. hispidus* than with any other known *Lepus*-species.

Sex unknown.

	m. m.
Total length of skull	70
Width between zygomatics	37
Length of nasal bones	22
Width of nasal bones behind	15,5
„ „ „ „ in front	11
Distance between both the molar series, upper jaw, behind	14
Length of the molars, upper jaw	14
„ „ „ „ , lower jaw	15,5

	m. m.
Distance between incisor and first upper molar . .	20
„ „ „ „ „ lower molar . .	15,5
Incisor of upper jaw, in front	3
Incisor of lower jaw, in front	3

Hab: Sumatra; Padang-Pandjang. (E. Netscher.)

Padang-Pandjang about 2000 feet above the sea, in the plains Sawahs (Rice-fields), for the rest woods. The climate is humid (v. Rosenberg).